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"Big Lie" in Angola

The civil war in Angola confronts the United Nations with one more moment of truth. Cuban troops and Soviet arms, brought in by a large-scale Russian air- and sea-lift, appear to be turning the tide in favor of the Communist-led Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This blatant military intervention by white powers from distant continents in the internal affairs of a black African country is the kind of aggression that the United Nations was created to oppose.

In the fact of this first major reintroduction of great-power rivalry on the African continent since the Soviet adventure in the Congo fifteen years ago, the General Assembly yesterday was debating a resolution condemning the intervention of South Africa, which evidently has permitted a small number of mercenaries to aid rival Angolan groups in the south, FNLA and UNITA. It was in these circumstances that United States Ambassador Daniel P. Moynihan rightly described as the "big lie" the inference that only one nation, South Africa, was intervening in Angola. He called on the General Assembly to denounce, as well, the intervention of Cuba and "a new European colonial, imperialistic power"—the Soviet Union—which is intruding itself into West Africa at a time when other European nations have withdrawn.

The Soviet Union already holds military facilities in Somalia on the northeast coast of Africa, an area strategically located for naval and air action in the Indian Ocean and the entrances to the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. In Angola, a 1,000-mile coastline with deep water ports and Portuguese-built airfields could provide the Soviet Union with a dominant position along the South Atlantic.

The Organization of African Unity has denounced all outside intervention in Angola. It should be encouraged to play a more active role in bringing the three rival Angolan factions into negotiations and a peaceful settlement, perhaps one based on federation, since the three groups stem from different tribal territories.

The Zaire proposal condemning all foreign intervention in Angola would be a useful first step for the General Assembly to take. But the Security Council is the body in the United Nations that is supposed to act against the kind of military aggression Cuba and the Soviet Union have mounted on the borders of both Zaire and Zambia, which also has protested against outside intervention.

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, has unleashed its controlled press in defense of its action as support of a "national liberation struggle" and, therefore, not "incompatible" with détente. According to Izvestia, "the process of détente" does not rule out armed intervention in Angola or require "the cessation of anti-imperialist struggles... against foreign interference and oppression."

This double-think sham is far from compatible with the principles of co-existence signed by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1972. Its exposure is within the capability of the United Nations, even if military action against a superpower is not.